

New Jersey (Cunningham article)

NEW JERSEY REFERENCE

LET'S EXPLORE

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THE Millstone River is unique among New Jersey's streams. Not only does it flow directly opposite the course nature originally intended—it also rises in almost the exact geographical-center of the state, then meanders northward to the Raritan River in a line equidistant from both sides of the state.

It is true that the Millstone traverses the state's heartland, and in its 35-mile run it typifies much of New Jersey. Geologists say the river has many of the characteristics of South Jersey's sandy streams, but the grassy meadows, the dairy farms, the red barns and the colonial heritage spell North Jersey.

Where better to start 1950's explorations of New Jersey than the heartland? Good roads follow the river all the way and few areas can match the peaceful river with its unparalleled lush green meadows and long lines of buttonwood and water birch trees. Every turn offers something new—here a beautifully-kept old mansion, there a picturesque windmill towering over a cluster of red barns.

STARTING at a point on Route 29 two-thirds of a mile west of the Chimney Rock quarry, today's route goes southward to Carnegie Lake in Princeton. That's only half the river, but it's enough to prove the Millstone's virtues.

Near Weston the river edges close to the road and at first the surface is so unruffled it is difficult to tell which

THIS visit to the Millstone River starts the annual Summer "Let's Explore" series of interesting and scenic trips over North Jersey's less travelled roads. "Let's Explore" was awarded the 1949 citation for distinguished public service to New Jersey" by the State, Department of Conservation and Economic Development.

way the water is flowing. Then you are apt to get the feeling that the Millstone is running in the wrong direction. That's a logical feeling: Few rivers flow north and in so doing the Millstone is contravening plans nature laid before the Ice Age.

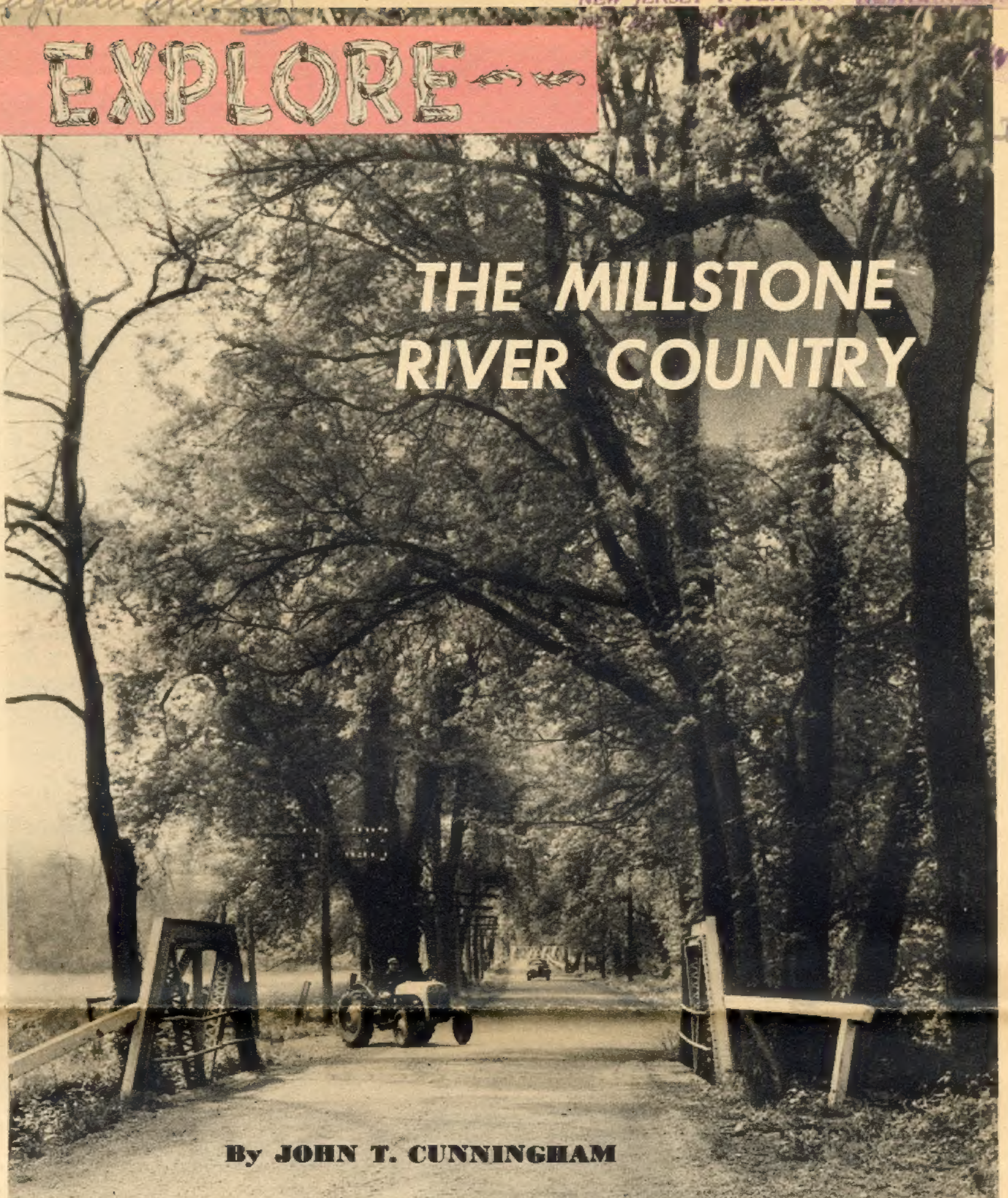
Once, geologists say, the Raritan River followed its present course until it touched the Millstone Valley. Then it streamed down the valley and eventually emptied into the Delaware at Trenton. Earth upheavals changed the Raritan's route into its present channel and the Millstone River was formed from South Jersey streams to flow unnaturally to the North.

A SCORE of mills which once used the river gave the Millstone its name, although the quiet waters give little evidence of power. The river falls only 26 feet in the 17 miles from Carnegie Lake to Bound Brook, but the water volume is so heavy that even small dams built up power for whirling millstones.

Few dams are left, but in the 19th Century there were so many that a special law was enacted to govern them. Mill owners were required to build their water barriers so that boats could easily pass up and down the river. Also, the dams had to be opened every year between March 20 and May 20 to let fish swim up the stream.

NEWARK SUNDAY NEWS

THE MILLSTONE RIVER COUNTRY



By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

Trees form leafy archway over Griggstown road. In center background is one of Millstone River bridges.

The road followed today was laid out more than 200 years ago. During the Revolution it was seldom still. First Washington marched his bleeding and impoverished troops northward on the road to Pluckemin after smashing the British at Princeton in January, 1777. Two years later the Queen's American Rangers, led by the redoubtable Col. Simcoe, ripped down the valley from Bound Brook, burning and pillaging. Smaller foraging parties continuously swept into the valley at harvest time.

SIMCOE'S raiders left an enduring mark on the village. They burned the Somerset County court house, built in Millstone in 1737, and the location was moved to safer Somerville, ending Millstone's political sway in Somerset.

There is still visible evidence of Simcoe's Rangers in bullet marks in the steeple of the Dutch Reformed Church. The Rangers used the steeple for musket practice. When the original church was torn down to make way for the present building in 1828 the old spire was utilized.

Just south of the church is the widely-known John VanDoren House, built in 1740 and occupied by the VanDoren family from 1753 until

1925. The house is still a private residence. It was here that Washington and his staff stayed during the 1777 movement.

LATER British troops arrived at the house and sought to gain information about the Continental cause from Mrs. VanDoren. It is said that she was hung in the cellar of the house by her heels until she was black in the face, but still refused to divulge any secrets. A British officer, infuriated, slashed a door frame inside the house and the saber mark can still be seen.

The VanDoren farm once covered a broad area. Evidence that it was used agriculturally by the Indians long before colonists came is an old Indian grindstone in front of the Dutch Reformed Church. The stone was found on the VanDoren farm, where an Indian village is believed to have been located.

Headed toward Princeton the road rises over a long bluff and the motorists can look out over dairy cattle grazing in the rich grassland to the stream far away. Windmills can be spotted on many farms. Few of the spinning blades now pump water, but they retain their eye-appeal.

Generally the Millstone gives little

reason for the old Indian name of Mattawang ("hard to travel"). Yet, residents along the way tell of how the river occasionally sends muddy waters swirling over the roads after heavy Spring rains. The fact that nearly 20 good-sized streams (with names like "Devil's Brook" and "Ten-Mile Run") drain a 400-square-mile watershed into the Millstone accounts for the floods.

The road soon touches Route 31, where a left turn is made, followed by another left turn at the next crossroad. This goes into Rocky Hill, across the Millstone again and over the Delaware and Raritan Canal. Up the hill is the Berrien Mansion, where Gen. Washington and Mrs. Washington spent the Summer of 1783 while Congress was in session in Princeton. Here Washington wrote his Farewell Address and in November, 1783, he stood on the balcony to read the now-familiar words to his troops.

Beyond the mansion the next road to the right carries to a junction with Route 27 at Kingston. A right turn in Route 27 recrosses the canal and the Millstone River and heads for Carnegie Lake.

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(Continued)



Kingsland flour mill at end of Carnegie Lake. Stone bridge in background, built in 1793, replaced span destroyed by Washington's army.



Historic Berrien Mansion at Rocky Hill, where Gen. Washington wrote and delivered Farewell Address to his troops in 1783.



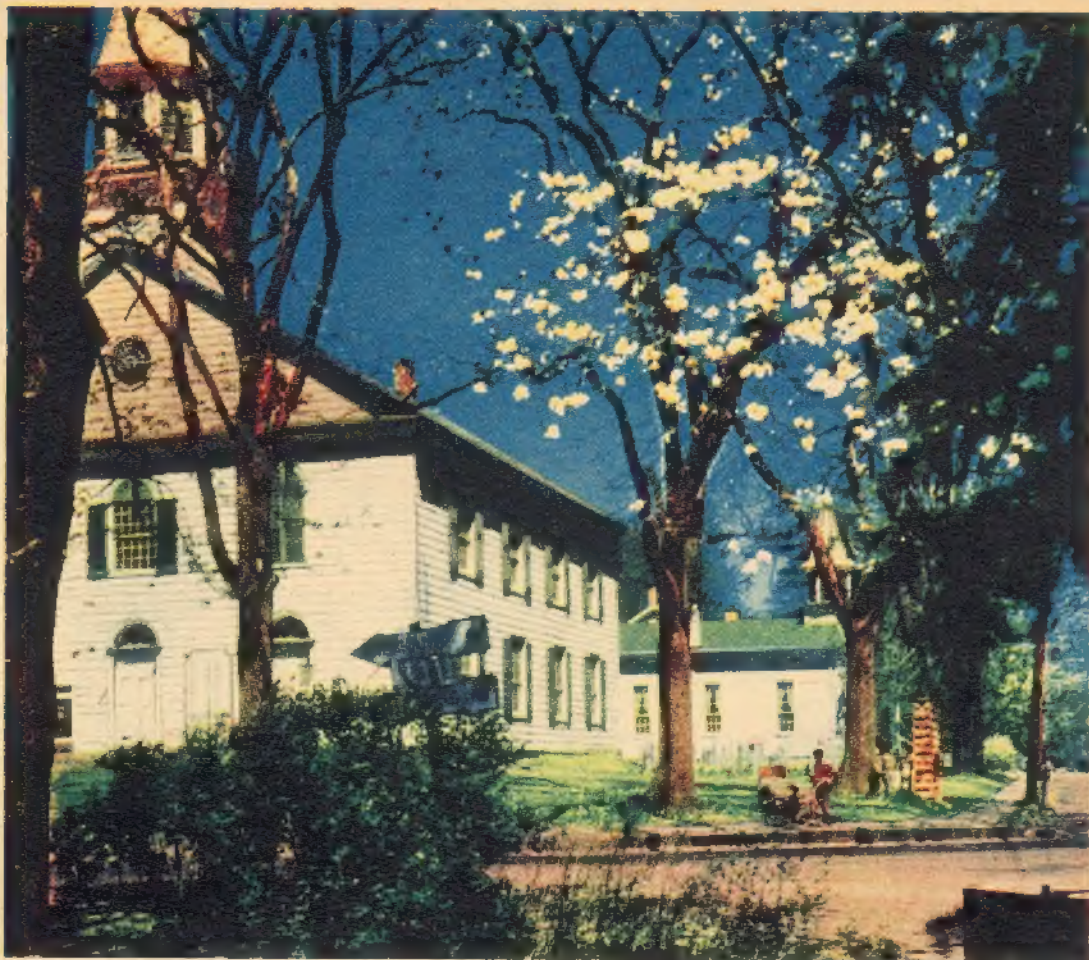
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Carnegie Lake, scene of Princeton regattas, was steelmaker's gift. It was once swampland at junction of Millstone and Stony Brook.



Bridge over Millstone River leading to Griggstown. Rows of buttonwood and water birch trees line the placid stream.



Dutch Reformed Church in Millstone Village Center. Built in 1828, it replaced edifice damaged by British raiders during the Revolution.

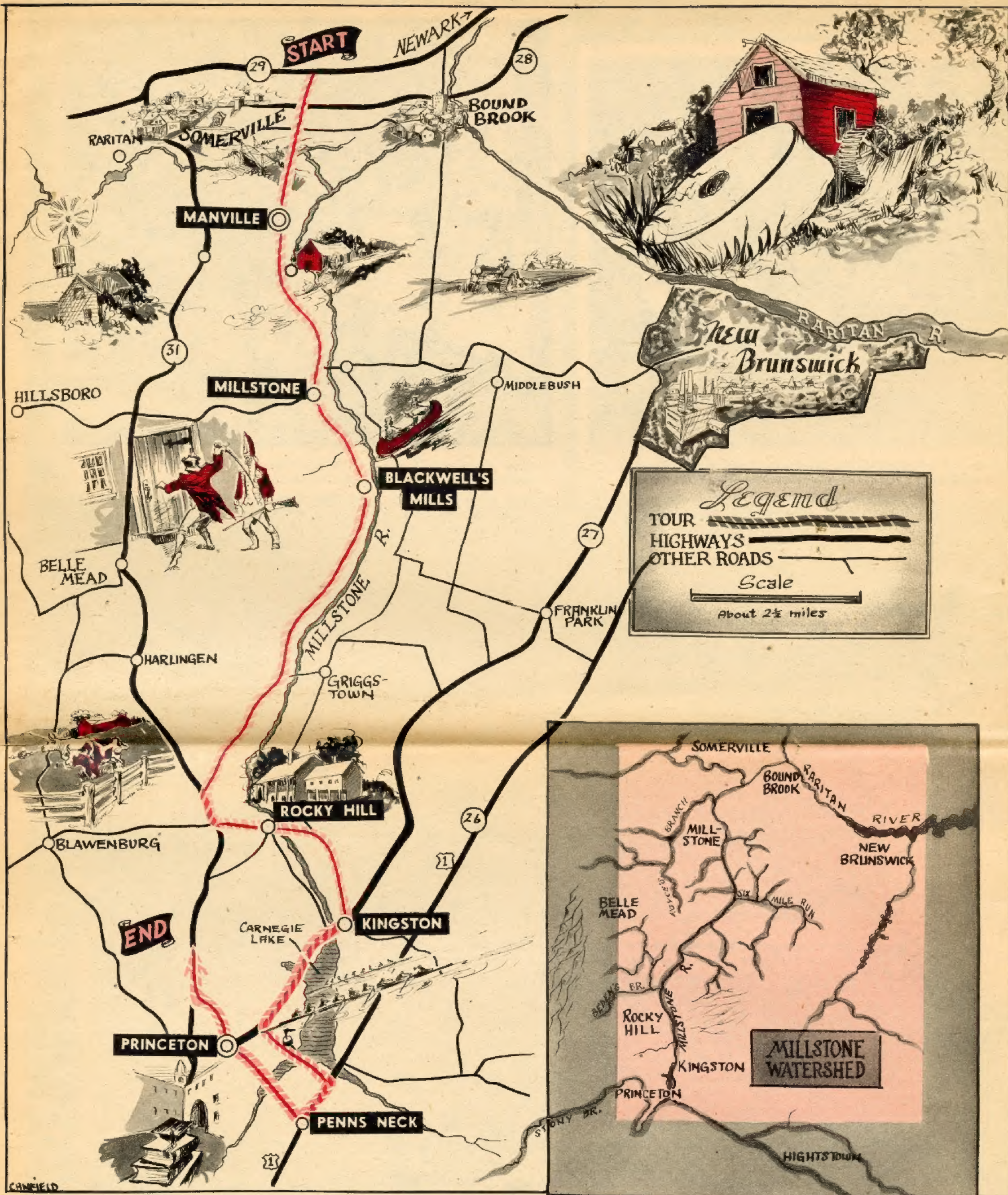


Color photos by Tuttle. Porter.

(Turn Page for Map of Area and Continuation of Story on Tour)



Typical farm along the Millstone. Windmill, one of many found in the valley, is preserved for picturesque quality. Few are used to pump water.



LET'S EXPLORE--Millstone Valley

(Continued from Page 11)

THIS crossing of the Millstone, incidentally, is made on a stone bridge built just after the Revolution to replace the span Washington's army destroyed in the withdrawal from Princeton. At the west side of the bridge is the red and white Kingston mill. This mill, and one at Weston, are the only mills left and neither uses water power.

Carnegie Lake is best reached by Harrison avenue, Princeton, a street to the left in the first cluster of business buildings slightly less than two

miles past the mill. The three-mile lake was dedicated in 1906 amidst great celebration at Princeton University. Two years of work financed

by Andrew Carnegie turned a dismal swamp at the junction of the Millstone and Stony Brook into the sparkling lake.

The westernmost bridge over the lake will lead to a traffic circle at Route 1 and the pleasant road to Hightstown, where the Millstone forms Peddie Lake. Alternatively, excellent roads lead homeward from Princeton.

COVER PHOTO

Millstone River at Blackwell's Mills makes a picturesque setting for strolling girl and dog. Small dam shows how river power, which once operated 20 grist mills along banks, can be increased despite low natural fall.

Good roads follow river all the way for this season's first tour of country located in Garden State's geographical center.